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**Subject:** POLITICO's Morning Energy, presented by Anheuser-Busch: Zinke's turn on the Hill — EPA watchdog: Aides slow to turn over docs — House to take up Yucca bill today

By Kelsey Tamborrino | 05/10/2018 10:00 AM EDT

*With help from Eric Wolff, Alex Guillén, Anthony Adragna and Jennifer Haberkorn*

**ZINKE HEADS TO THE HILL:** Interior Secretary Ryan Zinke faces his Senate appropriators today to discuss his department's budget request for fiscal 2019. Expect Democrats to bring up familiar topics, such as his plans to reorganize the department and last year's decision to shrink national monuments in Utah. Subcommittee ranking member Tom Udall plans to tell Zinke that until courts weigh in on whether his move was legal, "I believe that moving forward with land management plans that will open these iconic areas to development is reckless."

**Subcommittee Chair Lisa Murkowski may be interested** in hearing more about Zinke's plans for oil and gas development in Alaska, after Interior kicked off its environmental review of potential drilling in part of the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge thanks to language she got included in last year's tax bill. And Sen. Lamar Alexander, another member of the subcommittee, can follow up on the maintenance backlog for the national parks, an issue the two discussed when Zinke visited Tennessee last week.

**Ahead of the hearing**, the Coalition to Protect America's National Parks is sending a letter to Zinke, with signatures from current and former employees of the National Park Service, calling on him to support permanent reauthorization of the Land and Water Conservation Fund, an issue with support in both parties.

**If you go:** The Senate Appropriations Interior-Environment Subcommittee hearing begins at 9:30 a.m. in 138 Dirksen.

**- But first:** Zinke will join Agriculture Secretary Sonny Perdue at USDA headquarters for an 8 a.m. briefing on the forecast for this year's wildfire season.

**WATCHDOG: EPA AIDES SLOW TO SEND DOCS:** EPA's internal watchdog complained last year that Administrator Scott Pruitt's aides were taking their sweet time handing over documents related to a probe into their boss' travels, new emails show. Although the standoff between the inspector general's office and Pruitt's staff was resolved a month later, the incident illustrates tensions between political appointees and career oversight officials that developed early on. The IG's office is in the process of conducting multiple reviews into Pruitt's actions.

**The new emails**, released under a FOIA request from California's Justice Department, show the IG's office was seeking information for its probe of Pruitt's frequent travel to Oklahoma on EPA business, Pro's Alex Guillén reports. That same probe was later expanded to include a wider swath of Pruitt's travel practices, including his first-class flights that cost more than \$100,000. (The investigation is slated to be completed this summer.)

**At the time, the agency's assistant inspector general for audits**, Kevin Christensen, wrote to a top career official in EPA's finance office to warn of a "potential situation" with the travel audit just two weeks after it began, the emails show. Christensen flagged messages showing Pruitt's chief of staff Ryan Jackson was

"screening" documents before releasing them to the Office of Inspector General. "This does not fit the definition of unfettered access or comply with the Administrator memo on access and providing information to the OIG," Christensen wrote to Jeanne Conklin, EPA's controller who oversees financial management and reporting. "When we are denied access to information until approved for release, it raises the question as to what is being withheld and approved for release."

**The emails spotlight concerns about the lack** of transparency atop the agency since Pruitt joined. And other emails released to California's Department of Justice also show career ethics officials warning Pruitt's aides about accepting industry awards and attending political events, further exemplifying internal tensions as Pruitt's external problems grow. Read more from Alex [here](#).

**- Related reporting:** Amid ongoing scrutiny, Pruitt met with industry representatives Wednesday, where a reporter asked if he still had the confidence of the White House. Pruitt said: "I think they've spoken very clearly," Bloomberg [reports](#).

**WELCOME TO THURSDAY!** I'm your host Kelsey Tamborrino. Bracewell's Frank Maisano was the first to correctly identify Detroit as home to the first paved roadway. Woodward Avenue carries the designation M-1 for its status as the first place to pour a 1-mile patch of concrete roadway. For today: Name the state first lady who simultaneously served as a member of the House. Send your tips, energy gossip and comments to [ktamborrino@politico.com](mailto:ktamborrino@politico.com), or follow us on Twitter [@kelseytam](#), [@Morning\\_Energy](#) and [@POLITICOPro](#).

**TRUMP EXTENDS OLIVE BRANCH:** President Donald Trump called coal baron Don Blankenship Wednesday to exchange pleasantries and offer up congratulations for waging his campaign, POLITICO's Alex Isenstadt reports. The conversation was described as straightforward, polite and cordial, and comes days after Trump tweeted that voters shouldn't vote for Blankenship in the West Virginia Republican primary. Blankenship also published an [open letter](#) to Trump on Wednesday that in part blamed the president for his loss. "Your interference in the West Virginia election displayed a lack of understanding of the likely outcome of the upcoming general election," Blankenship wrote. But he ended with a note of optimism: "I look forward to meeting with you in the near future." Alex reported the president had also reached out to Rep. [Evan Jenkins](#), who also lost in Tuesday's primary, but had yet to connect with the Republican party's winner, Patrick Morrisey, as of Wednesday evening. Read [more](#).

**\*\* A message from Anheuser-Busch:** Anheuser-Busch announced that America's leading brewer has placed an order for up to 800 hydrogen-electric powered semi-trucks. The zero-emission trucks will be able to travel between 500 and 1,200 miles. Anheuser-Busch aims to convert its entire long-haul dedicated fleet to renewable powered trucks by 2025. [Learn more](#). \*\*

**HOUSE GOES NUCLEAR:** The House will take up the long-awaited [H.R. 3053 \(115\)](#), the "Nuclear Waste Policy Amendments Act of 2018," for consideration today, with votes expected between 10:45 a.m. and 11:45 a.m. The bipartisan legislation would update how the U.S. handles nuclear waste and promote development of the Yucca Mountain repository in Nevada, among other provisions. The legislation is expected to pass, although it will face a much shakier Senate reception with Sen. [Dean Heller](#) facing a tough re-election race this year. Rep. [John Shimkus](#), who introduced the comprehensive nuclear waste package, previously said he hadn't had any recent talks with Senate counterparts about potentially moving the bill across the Capitol. Still, its appearance today is a victory for Shimkus: [Greg Walden](#) told reporters this week that Shimkus had sent handwritten letters to the homes of every member of leadership during recess encouraging the bill to come up, praising his tenacity.

**COURT SAYS CRA IS A-OK:** A federal judge in Alaska Wednesday [dismissed](#) an environmental group's lawsuit that called the Congressional Review Act unconstitutional. The Center for Biological Diversity specifically challenged the CRA [resolution](#) successfully passed by Congress last spring that nullified an Interior Department rule regarding hunting in Alaska wildlife refuges.

**Judge Sharon Gleason of the U.S. District Court for Alaska, an Obama appointee,** noted that both the CRA itself and this specific resolution were passed by both chambers and signed by the president, fulfilling the constitutional requirements for creating laws. Other parts of CBD's argument similarly failed to hold water. "The Court finds that even construing all the facts in favor of CBD, CBD's constitutional claims fail to adequately allege a plausible basis for relief," Gleason wrote.

**SUNNY CALIFORNIA:** The California Energy Commission voted unanimously Wednesday to require solar panels be installed for all newly built single-family homes and multifamily buildings less than three stories starting in 2020. A CEC study found that installing solar would increase home prices, but that would be more than offset by lower utility bills, according to the Los Angeles Times. The move has been anticipated for years and was supported by much of the home building industry. More from the LAT [here](#).

**STEELWORKERS SAY YES TO RFS:** The United Steelworkers are supporting Trump's recent decisions on the Renewable Fuel Standard, which include expanding sales of 15 percent ethanol fuels and having EPA and USDA workout some kind of program for biofuel credits on exported ethanol. "While it will continue to review the details, [USW] supports a deal brokered by the President that appears to address the long-running conflict between ethanol producers and oil refiners over federal biofuels mandates," the union said in a press release.

**HOUSE GOP DROPS RESCISSIONS PACKAGE:** House Majority Leader [Kevin McCarthy](#) unveiled the chamber's batch of [spending cuts](#) Wednesday. Similar to the White House's [request](#), the package makes cuts to Energy Department loan guarantee programs for clean energy and vehicle technologies. The bill is expected to [go directly to the House floor for a vote](#), Pro's Sarah Ferris [reports](#). Senate GOP leaders have said they will consider the bill if and when it passes the House.

**MEANWHILE IN BONN:** Things aren't going as planned for the second week of climate talks in Bonn, Germany, punting further discussions to another meeting in September. The U.N. Framework Convention on Climate Change [said](#) Wednesday that there would be an additional meeting from Sept. 3-8 in Bangkok amid a stalemate centered in part around clarity on climate finance between developed and developing countries. The new date underscores the pressure negotiators are under to advance talks enough for ministers to strike a deal later this year at the COP24 in Katowice, Poland. "We need to resolve differences on finance, accounting and transparency," Alden Meyer of the Union of Concerned Scientists [told POLITICO Europe's](#) Kalina Oroschakoff.

**CALVERT: EPA-INTERIOR COMING SHORTLY:** Rep. [Ken Calvert](#), who oversees EPA and Interior on the Appropriations Committee, told ME to expect their fiscal 2019 bill "pretty soon" as work's going well. "We're working on final details now," he said. As for the perennial question, yes, Calvert expects policy riders to be in play: "There's always riders," he quipped.

**AUTOMAKERS WANT MORE FUEL EFFICIENCY:** The Alliance of Automobile Manufacturers and the Global Automakers, trade associations which together represent most of the automakers who sell cars in the U.S., will tell Trump that they most definitely want increases in fuel efficiency standards, contra that zero increase preference of the Department of Transportation. They also want the federal government to work out a single national standard with California, rather than face either a bifurcated market or a long legal battle. "Automakers are deeply committed to increased fuel economy and safety measures that meet the needs of our customers, and we expect to share the importance of government policies that provide certainty to the auto sector, continue to reduce greenhouse gas emissions, reflect what consumers will buy and result in a national policy that includes California," the two groups said in a statement.

**FOLLOW THE MONEY:** The Environmental Integrity Project released a database Wednesday of political contributions from companies and conservative organizations that met with Pruitt between Feb. 21, 2017, and April 13 of this year. The database was compiled via EPA calendars, FEC reports and data from the Center for Responsive Politics. See it [here](#).

**SAVE THE DATE:** BLM scheduled meetings to discuss its plans for an environmental review of planned oil and gas leases in ANWR. Several will be held in Alaska, including one each in Fairbanks and Anchorage on May 29 and May 30, respectively. Another meeting is scheduled for Washington D.C. on June 15. For those who can't make the hearings, BLM plans to live stream the Fairbanks and Anchorage dates.

**MAIL CALL! ISN'T IT IRONIC?** Six Democratic senators wrote to Office of Information and Regulatory Affairs Administrator Neomi Rao on the office's review and evaluation process for EPA's proposed "secret science" proposal to ban the use of studies that don't publicly disclose all their data. "The review process and rollout of this rule appears to have been rushed and secretive - which is particularly ironic for a proposal that purportedly aims to improve agency transparency and decision-making processes," they write.

**Separately**, bipartisan Reps. Ryan Costello and Paul Tonko sent a letter to the National Academy of Sciences asking for its input on the proposed rule, which was discussed when Pruitt testified before the House E&C Committee. Read the letter here.

**Of course, Pruitt seems pleased with the proposal:** Bloomberg's Ari Natter snapped a photo of new signs at EPA that tout the agency's "Strengthening Transparency in Regulatory Science."

**ROCK STARS:** Access Fund and American Alpine Club are sponsoring their annual "Climb the Hill" event today with professional rock climbers and outdoor recreation advocacy groups, who will hit the Hill today to talk outdoor recreation and public lands. Sen. Maria Cantwell will attend a reception with the group at 3 p.m. in 385 Russell. High-profile members of the rock-climbing community and executives from REI, Patagonia and The North Face will attend.

## QUICK HITS

- Pair of investor-pushed resolutions pass at Kinder Morgan, Axios.
- Saudis pledge to "mitigate" loss of Iranian oil exports from U.S. sanctions. But crude prices rise anyway, The Washington Post.
- Emails: Perdue's donors, agency coordinated on biomass, E&E News.
- Hugh Hewitt used his MSNBC gig to praise efforts to weaken a law that his firm's client is accused of violating, Media Matters.
- Emails show Heritage Foundation offered Pruitt flights, hotel, and talking points for its conference, ThinkProgress.

## THAT'S ALL FOR ME!

**\*\* A message from Anheuser-Busch:** Anheuser-Busch announced that America's leading brewer has placed an order for up to 800 hydrogen-electric powered semi-trucks from the pioneer in hydrogen-electric renewable technology, Nikola Motor Company. The zero-emission trucks - which will be able to travel between 500 and 1,200 miles and be refilled within 20 minutes, reducing idle time - are expected to be integrated into Anheuser-Busch's dedicated fleet beginning in 2020.

Through this agreement Anheuser-Busch aims to convert its entire long-haul dedicated fleet to renewable powered trucks by 2025.

"At Anheuser-Busch we're continuously searching for ways to improve sustainability across our entire value chain and drive our industry forward," said Michel Doukeris, CEO of Anheuser-Busch. "The transport industry

is one that is ripe for innovative solutions and Nikola is leading the way with hydrogen-electric, zero-emission capabilities. We are very excited by the possibilities our partnership with them can offer."

[Learn more.](#) \*\*

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